

Promising Practices Case Study: Language Aid Services (Multicultural Council of Windsor and Essex County, Windsor)
Background
<p>Multicultural Council of Windsor and Essex County (MCC) has long recognized the importance of equal and equitable access to services. They also acknowledge that clients with limited English proficiency face tremendous difficulty accessing services due to language barriers. Thus, there is a great need for trained and professional interpreters. Yet, providing professional interpreters for all service interfaces is very costly. Furthermore, trained interpreters are not always readily available. This is especially true with emerging newcomer communities. To help meet the demand for basic interpretation services, MCC started Language Aid services.</p>
The Model
<p>Language Aid Services provides a client from a non English speaking background with assistance through an individual that speaks the client's language. Language Aids are used for simple service interfaces (e.g. airport pickup/grocery shopping). Language Aids can provide basic assistance with communication during brief face to face or telephone communication through assistance with inquiries of a general or simple nature (e.g. making appointments).</p> <p>Language Aids are not interpreters and they have not been tested or trained as interpreters. While interpreters receive 180 hours of training and are tested for their proficiency with English and other languages, no formal education is required for Language Aids. Although Language Aids do not need to have professional interpreting qualifications, MCC believes it is good practice to provide basic training in order to develop skills and confidence. At MCC, Language Aids are provided 4 hour basic training with curriculum which includes core competencies, standards of practice and confidentiality.</p> <p>Given the qualifications and role of Language Aids, their remuneration differs from that of an interpreter's. Language Aids receive an honorarium for their services while interpreters are self employed and receive a standard rate of pay based industry standards; typically this includes being compensated for a minimum of 2 hours per service.</p>
Concrete Steps Taken
<p>MCC was able to implement the Language Aids Service because they have a Language Services Department and carry out the testing and training of interpreters in collaboration with St. Clair College. MCC first implemented Language Aids as a service for Government Assisted Refugees with support from Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC), which supported a Language Aid honorarium. MCC was able to expand Language Aid Services soon after to their other CIC programs. While MCC recognizes the usefulness of services that Language Aids provide, they continue to advocate for expanding the use of professional interpreters with different funding bodies.</p>
Strengths and Weaknesses of the Model

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The Language Aids Service is useful for several reasons. First, it works in cases where a language is rare and when professional interpreters speaking that language are not available. Second, the model is useful when another alternative, such as paying for a professional interpreter, exists. And, though this is not the preferred model, it can be somewhat effective when simple/basic service interfaces are required.

The model isn't without disadvantages. First, Language Aids are not professional interpreters. For example, Language Aids are not familiar with the technical or specialized terminology required to deliver different services. This limitation in knowledge can seriously hinder the replacement of a professional interpreter with a Language Aid. Second, there is the risk that a Language Aid may not provide accurate information to the client or service provider. Also, there is no guarantee that a service provider will use a trained interpreter for complex or technical communication when the more affordable option of Language Aid is available. These instances may lead to liability issues, especially when Language Aids are used for critical services such as interpreting legal documents or issues and financial or health related matters. To mitigate such liability issues, and to ensure that service providers understand the difference between a Language Aid and professional interpreter, MCC advises service providers ahead of time that they are using a Language Aid and not a professional interpreter. Ultimately, MCC insists that Language Aids Services is a bandage solution and not the preferred model for address language barriers in service delivery.

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